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May 3, 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

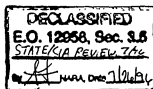
SUBJECT: Reactions to Cuba in Western Europe

1. I spent the period April 22-May 3 in Western Europe, first attending a conference of West European political and intellectual figures at Bologna, Italy, and then spending a few days in Paris and in London. I made a special point of trying to check reactions to the Cuban debacle -- and also of setting forth (especially to key politicians and journalists) the key facts of the Cuban situation.

In Paris, I had conversations with Pierre Mendes-France; Jean Monnet; Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber (L'Express); Raymond Aron; M. Jeanneney, the Minister of Production; M. Baraduc, the chief information officer of the Quai d'Orsay; as well as with Ambassador Gavin, Ambassador Finletter, Cecil Lyon, and the American correspondents Cy Sulzberger, Joe Alsop, Don Cook and Art Buchwald.

In London, I talked with publishers or editors of the Spectator (Ian Gilmour and Bernard Levin); New Statesman (Paul Johnson and Norman Mackenzie); Economist (Donald Tyerman); Observer (David Astor, John Pringle, Edward Crankshaw and leading staff people); Sunday Times (Frank Giles and Nicholas Carroll); Daily Herald (John Beavan); Daily Telegraph (Michael Berry and Maurice Green); Evening Standard (Charles Wintour); Sunday Telegraph (Peregrine Worsthorne); plus a luncheon with the diplomatic correspondents of the London papers and the Manchester Guardian. Among Labour MPs, I saw Hugh Gaitskell, Denis Healey, Richard Crossman, Roy Jenkins, George Brown, Woodrow Wyatt. Among members of the government, I saw David Ormsby-Gore, Ian Macleod, Reginald Maudling, Lord Hallsham, Sir Edward Boyle. I also saw Sir Frank Lee of the Treasury; Bob Boothby, Hartley Shawcross and Gladwyn Jebb, all of whom are now independent members of the House of Lords; Lord Lambton, a right-wing Tory MP; Sir Isaiah

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Berlin and William Deakin of Oxford; and the American correspondents Drew Middleton (New York Times) and Herman Nickels (Time). I also consulted closely, of course, with Ambassador Bruce and members of his staff.

I list these names to make clear the kind of opinions on which this report is based. I believe that in both Paris and London I saw a fairly representative cross-section of the political community. My impression of sentiment in these countries has been supplemented by my talks in Bologna with people from all over Western Europe and by the reports of American correspondents and diplomats.

I should add that I encountered everywhere what can only be described as a hunger for a rational explanation of the Cuban operation. I found this among left and right alike; among Americans as well as Europeans; among American Embassy officials (and even CIA representatives) as well as among American newspaper correspondents. The available stories had left most people baffled and incredulous. They could not believe that the U. S. Government had been quite so incompetent, irresponsible and stupid as the bare facts of the operation suggested, and they listened sympathetically and gratefully to a more balanced and complete account.

The apparent decision to keep our own diplomatic personnel in ignorance about the background of the Cuban operation seems to me especially unfortunate and unnecessary (though there may be considerations here of which I have no knowledge). The State Department appears to have sent out no instructions to American Embassies how to explain what happened in Cuba. As a consequence, our Ambassadors remain in the dark. If the Foreign Secretary of the state to which they are assigned asks them what really went on, they are forced to mouth official generalities or to confess ignorance or to rely on Scotty Reston or Time. This matter could easily have been remedied, in my judgment, if the State Department had sent out a simple instruction to our Embassies. I attach as Appendix A to this report the copy of a cable I sent to Mr. Rusk on this point from Rome.

2. Reactions to the debacle: short-term. The first reactions to Cuba were, of course, acute shock and disillusion. For some months nearly everybody in Western Europe, and especially perhaps the demo-

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cratic left, had been making heavy emotional and political investments in the new American administration. Everything about this administration -- the intelligence and vision of the President, the dynamism of his leadership, the scope and generosity of his policies, the freshness of his approach to the cold war -- had excited tremendous anticipation and elation. The new American President in three months had reestablished confidence in the maturity of American judgment and the clarity of American purposes. Kennedy was considered the last best hope of the West against communism and for peace.

Now, in a single stroke, all this seemed wiped away. After Cuba, the American Government seemed as self-righteous, trigger-happy and incompetent as it had ever been in the heyday of John Foster Dulles. "Kennedy has lost his magic," one person said to me. "It will take years before we can accept the leadership of the Kennedy Administration again," said another. Friends of America warned me not to underestimate the gravity of the damage: "Make sure that our people in Washington understand how much ground we have lost" (Drew Middleton); "It was a terrible blow, and it will take a long, long time for us to recover from it" (Lord Boothby).

I should add that nearly all the reactions I encountered expressed sorrow over the decision to invade rather than over the failure of the invasion. "Why was Cuba such a threat to you? Why couldn't you live with Cuba, as the USSR lives with Turkey and Finland?" I had expected to find more people on the right who would complain over our failure to send in the Marines; but I found only one -- Lord Lambton, a Tory MP who is a bitter critic of Macmillan's, a great friend of Joe Alsop's and an advocate of fighting everywhere -- in Laos, Kenya, Cuba, etc. Other Tory MPs -- Lord Hailsham, for example -- said that in their view US intervention would have been a great error and would only have converted Cuba into another Ireland, Cyprus or Algeria. David Ormsby-Gore, in making this point, added that British intelligence estimates, which he said had been made available to CIA, were that the Cuban people were still predominantly behind Castro and that there was no likelihood at this point of mass defections or insurrections.

3. Reactions to the debacle: long-term. The severity of the original shock should not, however, be allowed to overshadow certain

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factors on the other side. The fact is that the new administration made an enormously good impression up to Cuba and in so doing built up a fund of good will which, though now somewhat dissipated, is by no means entirely destroyed. One evidence of this is the eagerness of people on the left -- Mendes-France, Servan-Schreiber, even Dick Crossman and the New Statesman people -- to hear the American side of the case.

Reactions within the British Labour Party are perhaps symptomatic. Hugh Gaitskell was rueful but philosophical. "It was a great blow," he said. "The right wing of the Labour Party has been basing a good deal of its argument on the claim that things had changed in America. Cuba has made great trouble for us. We shall now have to move toward the left for a bit in order to maintain our position within the Party." But he asked what he could do to help, suggested people to whom I should talk and even made an appointment himself for me to see the editor of the Daily Herald. Denis Healey, the 'shadow' Foreign Secretary, was somewhat more bitter. "I've staked my whole political career on the ability of the Americans to act sensibly," he said. He felt badly let down by the Administration but again was perfectly ready to listen to an account of how things had actually happened. Farther to the left, Dick Crossman said, "You really have got off very lightly. If this had taken place under Eisenhower, there would have been mass meetings in Trafalgar Square, Dulles would have been burned in effigy, and the Labour Party would have damned you in the most unequivocal terms. But because enough faith still remains in Kennedy, there has been very little popular outcry, and the Labour Party resolutions have been the bare minimum. You've got away with it this time. But one more mistake like this, and you will really be through."

Conservatives were, on the whole, even more willing to find excuses for the Cuban policy. A number of people, both on the right and the left, remarked consolingly on the shortness of popular memories. Algeria, of course, was immensely helpful in driving Cuba from the front pages.

Over the longer term, in short, I think we have suffered a serious but by no means fatal loss of confidence in our intelligence and responsibility. This can be easily recouped if we seem to return to more intelligent and responsible ways in the future. However, it will all go rather quickly if we embark once more on a course which Europeans regard as ill-considered, impetuous and reckless.

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4. Dangers for the future. To sum up, Cuba is forgivable as an aberration but is greatly feared as forecasting future directions of US policy. It has created, for example, a vague fear in people's minds that the Kennedy Administration is bent on a course of subversive and paramilitary warfare. This fear has been heightened by what some Europeans regard as an unfolding pattern of events since Cuba, all seeming to foreshadow policies of military or paramilitary intervention: the "our patience is not limitless" speech; the emphasis on training for guerrilla warfare; the appeal to the press not to print stories about US unconventional warfare projects; the rumors of CIA support for the Algiers generals; the Presidential offer to intervene in France; the intimations of possible US intervention in Laos; the huddles with Nixon, Hoover, MacArthur, etc., interpreted in Europe as an effort to gather national support for, at the very least, a US invasion of Cuba. A number of people seriously believe, on the basis of newspaper stories from Washington, that an American invasion of Cuba is a distinct and imminent possibility. An Observer editor said to me, "If Cuba were just an accident, all right. But everything since Cuba suggests that the Kennedy who launched that invasion was the real Kennedy -- that all his talk about 'new methods' of warfare and countering guerrillas represents his real approach to the problems of the cold war -- that he thinks the West will beat communism by adopting communist methods and transforming itself into a regimented paramilitary society on the model of the Soviet Union." Several people said, "It's not Cuba that worries me; it's the aftermath."

The reported Washington obsession with guerrilla warfare has roused particular concern. Press stories have given high quarters in England and France the impression that the U. S. Government suddenly regards counter-guerrilla activity as the key to victory in the cold war. The attached piece from the Times expresses British feeling on this matter. Several people elaborately pointed out to me that guerrilla warfare can not be isolated from the political battle; that no force, however trained in counter-guerrilla technique, can clean up a guerrilla situation if the countryside sticks with the guerrillas; that the decisive question therefore is how the peasants feel. I was reminded that the guerrillas have been defeated in only two places since the war -- in the Philippines, because Magaysay's reform program won back the countryside; and in Malaya, because the British were able both to mobilize the Malaysians against the Chinese and to offer independence -- and that these examples show that politics, not combat methods, is the secret of success against guerrilla movements.

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The new tone of urgency in Washington has a somewhat shrill ring in many European ears. The Europeans to whom I talked believe that the fight against communism is still a matter for the long haul; they are much more impressed by the Alianza para el Progreso than by the training camps for anti-guerrilla warfare; and they hope for a return to the main lines of US foreign policy as set forth in the months before Cuba. I should add that nothing would do more to reestablish confidence in the U.S. Government than a visible shake-up and subordination of CIA. As the Algerian affair showed, CIA is going to be blamed for everything, especially so long as it continues to operate under its present management. People are eager to believe that the President was misled by bad advice in the matter of Cuba, but they are also eager to be reassured that he will not continue to get the same bad advice in the future.

Arthur Schlesinger, jr.

cc: Mr. Bundy
The Attorney General
Mr. Sorensen
Mr. Goodwin

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